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ABSTRACT

California's Southwestern College (SWC) conducted student surveys and synthesized research data to create a report that identifies 12 common student experience themes, providing a framework for improvement. The study includes information from various surveys, a review of responses to the 1990 Community College Student Experience Questionnaire, and results from a study of student behavior in the classroom. A qualitative approach was used to integrate the research documents and create a list of themes describing key features of the SWC student experience. The 12 themes are: (1) though faculty ratings were high, faculty/student interaction outside of class was low; (2) multiple learning techniques were preferred over straight lecture; (3) students' expectations for college success varied; (4) ratings on grading policies were varied; (5) many external obstacles existed to college success; (6) counseling was rated to be one of the weaker SWC services; (7) cultural diversity was respected; (8) student relations were perceived as friendly and supportive; (9) older students were more successful than younger students; (10) college activities had low participation; (11) the SWC Education Center in San Ysidro received higher ratings than the main campus; and (12) assistance provided by the College assessment program received mixed reviews. These themes provide guidelines for future improvements. Appendices include institutional research documents used to identify student perceptions, and the relationship of research documents to identification of student experiential themes. (YKH)

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ED 411 930

Southwestern College

Summary Report

Southwestern College Student Experiences: A Synthesis of Survey Findings and Classroom Observations

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Prepared by: **Southwestern College**
College Planning Office
900 Otay Lakes Road
Chula Vista, CA 91910
(619) 482-6302/6303

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Southwestern College

Summary: Southwestern College Student Experiences, A Synthesis of Survey Findings and Classroom Observations

Preface

During the past academic year, Southwestern College (SWC) developed and adopted a revised five-year institutional plan with a mission, "committed to meeting the educational goals of its students in an environment that promotes intellectual growth and develops human potential." This mission is bolstered by ten strategic goals that include achieving excellence in all educational programs and support services, building a positive learning and working environment, and responding to a changing and diverse community.

At the beginning of the 1993-94 academic year, the Superintendent/President formed a special task force of faculty and administrators to do a preliminary examination of a white paper posing the concept of a changed academic calendar and modification of class scheduling. This white paper and myriad other proposed institutional changes have the underlying purpose of helping students achieve their educational goals and meeting their needs.

This report describes student needs and attitudes about SWC, based on a review of student survey data gathered during the past decade. For the first time, information from a variety of research studies providing student feedback on their experience at SWC has been systematically reviewed and synthesized. This analysis of prior student surveys was augmented by a unique approach of observing and talking to students in the classroom setting during the summer session of 1993. Although there are realistic limits that must be placed on the interpretation of the findings in this study, it revealed a set of experiential themes of SWC students. Some of the student surveys were conducted of program completers between 1983-84 and 1989-90, after they left SWC. Some were conducted in classrooms while students were still enrolled (1990 and 1992). In total, 18 different institutional research documents were examined to identify the common experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of SWC students. This was capped by observations and informal discussions with students by a trained anthropologist.

The result of this synthesis of survey data and qualitative observations was the identification of twelve themes that are common to student experiences at SWC. These themes may not be the only common perceptions of students during the past decade, but they provide a framework that should be considered in assessing the need for and the nature of institutional change. The purpose of this document is to inform the reader about the twelve themes and the basis for their existence. We hope the findings are helpful for faculty, administration and staff alike who are dedicated to making SWC a place where excellence is pursued.

Acknowledgements: Dr. Eva Bagg, was instrumental in the conduct of the literature review and analysis. She was responsible for the classroom observations that were an important part of this study and we appreciate her role and insights in the production of this report. A word of appreciation is also extended to the research and planning staff for their contribution to the final report.

SUMMARY REPORT

Southwestern College Student Experiences: A Synthesis of Survey Findings and Classroom Observations

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SUMMARY REPORT

Southwestern College Student Experiences: A Synthesis of Survey Findings and Classroom Observations

Introduction

Recently, the College Planning and Research Office undertook a special internal project to review and analyze key findings from a number of institutional research projects conducted between fall 1987 and spring 1993. The result of this effort provides information regarding students' perceptions of their college experience at Southwestern College (SWC). The study revealed certin general patterns that emerge from institutional research that includes student follow-up survey responses for a seven-year period and observations of students in the classroom at SWC. One of the intended uses of the study is to provide a focus document on student experiences for faculty discussion and staff development activities planned for the 1993-94 academic year.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to identify common themes related to student perceptions of their educational experiences at SWC.

Limitations

This is the first effort to synthesize nearly a decade of research on SWC students. Without question there are limitations to such an undertaking. The sources of research data and many of the survey forms used to obtain student feedback were not designed for making cross comparisons. Survey items in various instruments were not phrased in exactly the same manner, and data analysis in various institutional research efforts served different purposes.

Despite these and other limitations, the value of seeing if there were common themes that students reported over time seemed to outweigh the technical differences in research methodologies used in prior studies. Thus, interpretation of the findings must be accepted for what they are, even though they provide an interesting framework for stimulating discussion among faculty, administrators, and staff of the College.

Sources of Data

This study includes highlights synthesized from three major sources of information:

1. Information generated during the past five years from student responses to various surveys. The titles of all the documents reviewed for this study appear in Appendix A of this report. The documents which proved most germane to this project include the Student Follow-up Survey Summaries from 1983 to 1990, the Occupational Program Student Classroom Survey and the Student Satisfaction Survey, Fall 1992. This report, unlike the strictly quantitative

prior studies, considers in a more qualitative way the comments which students volunteered as addenda to their Follow-up Survey responses.

2. Information for this report also draws on an extensive review of responses to the Community College Student Experience Questionnaire (CCSEQ) administered in the Spring of 1990. At SWC, 1560 students completed this survey. Of these, 1,420 students attended classes primarily on the main campus and 140 students indicated that most of their classes were taken at the Education Center at San Ysidro. The responses to this survey were summarized by age, ethnicity, site, and time of day for class attendance. A selective reporting of some of the data compiled from student responses to this questionnaire appears in SWC Student Experiences -- 1990. This document persents findings not itemized in the earlier SWC Student Experiences document.

3. For the first time, this study reports information from a qualitative study of student behavior in the classroom conducted during the Summer session of 1993. Students were observed in the classroom setting for a total of 30 hours. Three classes were selected for observation. This selection was not random. It included Introduction to Composition, Elementary Algebra, and General Psychology. Instructors in these classes voluntarily participated by allowing an observer to sit in their classes for 2 to 3 sessions.

Methodology

Analyses for this study were purposefully qualitative rather than statistical because the main objective of this project was to generate a human portrait of the students who attend SWC rather than a statistical profile. More specifically, a qualitative approach allows consideration of the student subjective and open-ended comments on their college experience. Finally, strictly statistical analyses of the student survey responses have been previously conducted, and reports on these analyses are available for review in the College Planning and Research Office.

Findings from the diverse research documents were integrated in the following way. A list of themes describing key features of the SWC student experience was generated from an extensive review of all of the documents referenced in Appendix A. Notations were made as to whether or not information related to each theme was addressed in each of the documents that were reviewed. The studies used were coded as follows: the study report contained data that directly support a particular student theme; it contained data that indirectly support the theme; it contained data that contradicted the theme; it did not contain information relevant to the theme. A chart showing how different research documents relate to the themes identified as significant to SWC student college experiences is presented in Appendix B.

Organization of This Report

Major findings that support the identification of a dozen student themes appear in three separate sections of this report. Part I addresses the major themes that emerge from the synthesis of the various follow-up surveys of SWC program completers conducted from 1983-84 to 1989-90. Part II highlights findings from student responses to the 1990 Community College Student Experience

Questionnaire. The final section, Part III, includes findings that emerge from the classroom observations conducted during the summer session of 1993 which contributed to the identification of the student themes listed below.

The synthesis of research outlined in this report and classroom observations were conducted by anthropologist, Marie Bagg, Ph. D. for the College Planning and Research Office.

Major Themes Revealed by This Study

Analysis of previous institutional research studies and classroom observations led to the identification of the following major themes.

1. Students gave high faculty (instructor) ratings, but faculty/student interaction outside of class was low.
2. Students preferred multiple learning techniques rather than straight lecture.
3. Students expectations of college success varied from low to high.
4. Students report mixed ratings on grading policies.
5. Students faced multiple external obstacles/challenges to college success such as work, finances, and family obligations.
6. Student ratings of counseling services were moderate compared to ratings for other SWC experiences.
7. Students were aware of cultural diversity at SWC and sense that their own heritage is respected.
8. Students generally perceived that relations among students are supportive and friendly.
9. Older students seemed to study more/longer and perform better than younger students.
10. There was a relatively low rate of student participation in college activities.
11. The SWC Education Center at San Ysidro received higher student ratings on most factors than the main campus.
12. Students were mixed in their opinion about the College assessment program helping them enroll in proper classes.

Concluding Statement

Other student themes may exist, but those noted above were the most prevalent and most easily identified by existing institutional research that spans the past decade. It should be noted that none of the themes are especially startling, but they are useful in understanding student attitudes about SWC and recognizing some of their needs when planning programs and services. Although no effort was made in this study to place the themes in any priority order, there were relationships among several experiential themes of students and some themes may be more germane to institutional change than others. For example, the fact that many students face external obstacles/challenges related to work schedules, family obligations, and financial limitations is important in examining alternate academic calendars and class schedules. The fact that students prefer multiple learning techniques rather than straight lectures has implications for instructional delivery. And the fact that the Education Center at San Ysidro received higher ratings on many counts than the main campus indicates that some practices there could be emulated on the main campus when possible.

Part I

Highlights from a Synthesis of Multiple Research Reports Compiled from 1983-84 to 1989-90

Background

The College Planning and Research Office conducts a follow-up mail survey of all program completers each year. Data from such surveys are published and distributed to the administration and faculty of the college. This report summarizes information related to a number of themes that emerged from the analysis of follow-up studies and other internal studies: 1) high ratings of instructors, 2) increase in student cultural awareness and their own cultural heritage, 3) moderate ratings of counseling services, 4) external factors pose challenges to student success, and 5) students enrolled at the Education Center at San Ysidro consistently gave higher ratings to their college experience than those on the main campus. The rest of this section explains the basis for these themes.

I. Instructor Ratings - Students gave consistently high ratings to instructors.

Over a seven-year period during which follow-up surveys were administered to program completers, students gave high ratings to the "quality of instruction" they received at Southwestern College. (See documents 7, 12, and 15). The following scores and all of those drawn from the Follow-up Survey documents are based on a scale in which 1.0 signified a low rating and 5.0 signified a high rating.

1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
3.9	4.1	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.1

More than 75% of the students responding to the Community College Student Experience Questionnaire administered in the Spring of 1990 (see documents 10 and 16) indicated that "all" or "most" of their instructors were "approachable, helpful, and supportive." Interestingly, a higher proportion of Anglo students tended to give higher instructor ratings (84%) than did other ethnic groups (American Indian 70%, Asian/Pacific Islander 70%, African-American 72%, and Hispanic 72%).

Specific questions related to student interaction with faculty reveal that students were more likely to ask their instructors about course procedures, grading practices and specific assignments than about actual course content. To an even lesser degree, students also indicate that they discuss their career and educational plans with their instructors. By far, the area of least interaction between students and faculty involves meeting instructors in their offices. While Anglo students reported talking with instructors after class about course content somewhat more frequently than Non-Anglo students, Non-

Anglo students were more likely than Anglo students to ask their instructors about class procedures, grading policies and assignments. (See document 16).

Very positive student assessment of Southwestern College teaching is replicated in the SWC Learning Styles Project report. Findings from this study show that students rated the quality of instruction as "good" (53%), "excellent" (27%) and "outstanding" (16%). (See document 18).

Although no direct elicitation of instructor evaluation was made in other survey instruments, students volunteered comments on the quality of instruction at SWC. Most of these comments were quite positive: "It (SWC) has wonderful and helpful teachers that are always willing to help you out;" "Southwestern College has many good teachers;" and "The instructors at SWC have been excellent." Some students expressed their appreciation to specifically named instructors.

There were a few statements indicating the existence of a least some student dissatisfaction with a few instructors. One student commented, "I've encountered a few teachers that were terrible. Most were good, some were exceptional. But the bad ones were really bad." (See documents 2 and 3).

II. Awareness of Student Diversity

Program completers indicated that their Southwestern College experience contributed to a moderately high degree in increasing their cultural awareness. Average ratings over the 7-year period are shown below:

1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89		1989-90	
					voc	tran	voc	tran
3.4	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.0

Overall, there was no significant difference among transfer and vocational students over time, except for 1989-90 when transfer students gave only moderate ratings to the impact which their SWC experience had on increasing their cultural awareness compared to vocational students. (See documents 7, 12 and 15.)

Student comments about ethnic diversity at SWC were examined. These comments were categorized as reflecting either a positive or negative attitude about SWC ethnic diversity. Although fewer than a dozen comments were made in most years, the number of positive (+) comments diminished between 1985-86 and the number of negative (-) comments seemed to increase. The tally of each appears below for those years that such information is available.

	1985-86		1986-87		1987-88		1988-89	
Number of	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Comments	8	2	6	5	8	10	5	6

Comments offered in 1985-86 were predominantly positive while this pattern steadily shifted with a scant majority of negative comments given in 1987-88 and 1988-89. This shift does not seem to be of major proportions but could signal growing student concerns about campus climate.

Additional qualitative data related to ethnic diversity on campus appear in other student surveys. (See documents 2 and 3.) Again, there were no objective survey questions that directly addressed the issue of student perceptions or concerns related to student diversity at SWC. However, students volunteered comments that related to this dimension of their experience. One student expressed dissatisfaction, "SWC did not have any support groups for ethnic groups." Another complained about residents of Tijuana attending SWC. Another implied that some SWC instructors treat students differently based on ethnicity. This student suggested we "give an exam to the instructors about ethnic groups because many instructors like to put down others." Diverse ethnicity was much more positively experienced and perceived by another student who stated, "I have to thank SWC for making me aware of my Hispanic roots. It was because of the significant number of Mexican-Americans that attend this college. Also Mexican-American History has helped a lot."

This last comment is consistent with the moderately high ratings students gave indicating that their own cultural heritage was respected at Southwestern. (See documents 7, 12 and 15).

1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89		1989-90	
					voc	tran	voc	tran
3.5	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.7

III. Counseling and Guidance - Students consistently gave moderately high ratings to the quality of counseling and guidance they received at SWC compared to other college experiences.

The average ratings given to counseling services by program completers surveyed over the seven-year period appear as follows (see documents 7, 12 and 15):

1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
3.1	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.4

Responses from the 1990 Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire (document 16) revealed that 75% of all responding students met with a counselor to discuss course requirements and educational plans. 57% of the students discussed their vocational interests, abilities, and ambitions with a counselor. 47% of the students talked to a counselor about their specific transfer plans compared to 36% who sought counsel about personal matters related to their college performance. This survey also revealed that 25% of the responding students found SWC counselors to be "very helpful" in identifying their academic goals compared to 17% who found counselors "very helpful" in defining their career goals. The percentages of students indicating that the counselors at the Education Center at San Ysidro were very helpful with identifying academic and career goals were 67% and 49% respectively. This difference in student perceptions between the main campus and the education center is noteworthy.

IV. Challenges to SWC Student Success

Work: One of the most critical challenges to student success at SWC is a conflict with working hours. Student employment patterns from 1983 to 1990 are reported below. (See documents 7, 12 and 15.)

Employment

	1983-84		1984-85		1985-86		1986-87		1987-88		1988-89		1989-90	
	voc	tran	voc	tran	voc	tran	voc	tran	voc	tran	voc	tran	voc	tran
Full-Time	60%	22%	54%	47%	61%	46%	54%	38%	65%	46%	56%	38%	68%	42%
Part-Time	20%	43%	22%	28%	21%	29%	18%	36%	20%	31%	22%	33%	18%	30%

On average, during the five-year period from 1983 to 1988, nearly 4 out of 5 vocational students and nearly 3 out of 4 transfer students worked at least part-time. The proportion of vocational students who worked full-time increased from an average of 59% to 68% in 1989-90; those who worked part-time decreased from 20% to 18%. During this period, work patterns for transfer students shifted very little with 1% more working full-time and 2% fewer working part-time. That a high proportion of SWC students work is generally confirmed by responses to the 1990 CCSEQ, but no breakdown of transfer and vocational students was provided by this study. (See document 16.) The latter study indicated 79% of the responding students worked. Forty-three percent of these worked full-time and 36% part-time. This report shows that of this high portion of students who work, 70% say that work interferes with school at least somewhat. Furthermore, "conflict with working hours" is the obstacle to educational success most frequently cited by students responding to this questionnaire (37%). The related obstacle of "basic finances" was cited second most frequently (33%).

Family Responsibilities: Another factor identified as a challenge to student success is family responsibilities. 76% of students indicated that they have family responsibilities; of these 62% say that those responsibilities had at least some impact on their school work. (See document 16).

First Generation College Students: One factor presumed to strongly affect student success in identifying and achieving educational goals is being the first in one's family to attend college. Although SWC students have not been directly questioned about the ways in which this factor has actually shaped their educational experiences, the 1990 CCSEQ showed that 41% of SWC students were first-generation college attenders. Thirty-nine percent of the main campus student body and 47% of the students who attended the Education Center at San Ysidro were the first in their families to attend. This pattern was further reflected in ethnic differences for first-generation college attenders. The percentages for each ethnic group were as follows: 49% of Hispanics; 42% of Anglos; 22% of Asian/Pacific-Islanders; and 19% of African-Americans.

Language Barriers: The last factor identified as a further challenge to students is the need to learn a second language in order to participate in most academic activities. Forty-three percent of all SWC students responded that English is not their native language. (77% of the students attending the Education Center at San Ysidro were learning English-as-a-second-Language while 40% of the main campus students were doing so.)

V. Overall Highest Ratings to the Education Center at San Ysidro

Another theme which appeared consistently in all of those reports that allow comparison between students who attend the main campus and those who attend the Education Center at San Ysidro was

that the student experience at the Center was more positive than at the main campus. (See document 16).

Students' overall impression of the quality of SWC was rated by 91% of the Educational Center students as "excellent" or "good" compared to 78% of the main campus students.

The Education Center instructors also received higher ratings than did main campus instructors regarding students' perception of them as "approachable, helpful and supportive." Eighty-two percent of the Education Center students compared to 75% of the main campus students said this description may be applied to all or most of their instructors. Eighty percent of the Education Center students said all or most of their courses were "challenging, stimulating, and worthwhile" compared to 70% of the main campus students.

As reported above under the Counseling and Guidance section, Education Center students were more satisfied with the counseling services they received than were the main campus students. This pattern was replicated for other student services as well. 92% of the Education Center students indicated that the orientation staff either "very much helped" or "helped a little" in completing the orientation process compared to 80% of the main campus students. Although the gap between the Education Center students and the main campus students rating narrowed with regard to the assessment staff, still more Education Center students (90%) felt that this department's staff either "very much helped" or "helped a little" in completing the assessment process compared to 84% of the main campus students. The gap narrowed still further for responses related to student evaluation of the helpfulness of the admissions staff, but the Education Center ratings were still higher than the main campus ratings. Eighty-seven percent of the Education Center students and 85% of the main campus students felt that the admissions staff either "very much helped" or "helped a little."

The only item on which the main campus was rated higher than the Education Center refers to the presence of ample places to meet and study with other students. Forty-four percent of the main campus and only 29% of the Education Center students indicated that there were ample meeting and study places at their respective campuses.

Part II

Highlights from
1990 Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire

Background

In the spring of 1990 the College Planning and Research Office conducted a college wide classroom student survey. The survey instrument was a nationally used form, Community College Student Experience Questionnaire (CCSEQ). The survey forms were tabulated by the Research Center for Higher Education at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). A total of 1,560 SWC students participated in the study, of which 140 were from the Education Center at San Ysidro. A report containing an overview of the key findings of the survey was prepared and distributed to the college administration and faculty. The present report highlights student response patterns pertaining to various topics covered by the CCSEQ. When possible, survey findings are compared with findings from other research studies in which the same or similar topics are addressed. The findings from this student survey supported many of the common student themes noted in the introductory section of this report.

Demographics and Characteristics of Student Respondents

-- More than half of the responding students said that the main reason they were attending Southwestern College is to prepare for transfer to a four-year college or university. Twenty-two percent reported that their purpose in attending SWC is to gain skills necessary to enter a new job.

-- Forty percent of responding students said they were the first in their family to attend college.

-- Eighty percent of responding students work either full- or part-time. More than 40% of working students reported that their job takes "some" to "a lot" of time from their school work.

-- Conflict with working hours was the most frequently reported obstacle to achieving college goals. Thirty-seven percent of all responding students indicated work as a critical obstacle to college success.

-- Seventy-six percent of the responding students indicated that they have family responsibilities, while 47% indicated that their family responsibilities take "some" to "a lot of" time from their school work.

-- Nearly half of the responding students indicated that they spend only 1 to 5 hours per week preparing for their classes.

-- Another 30% said they devote 6 to 10 hours per week to class preparation. (The number of hours for class preparation has not been correlated with the number of units taken during a given semester. However, since about 60% of the responding students were taking between 9 and 15 units per semester, most students were probably spending less than 2 hours per week preparing for each 3-unit course.)

-- Given the high percentage of students who work, it is not surprising that students reported not spending much time on campus beyond the amount of time actually spent in class. 30% of responding students said they spend no additional time on campus. Thirty-seven percent said they spend 1 to 3 hours on campus in addition to their in-class time.

-- Nearly one-third of the responding students indicated that they received and understood their assessment test results. 22% reported that they enrolled in courses based on their test results. Another 15% indicated that the courses they took were appropriate to their skill and abilities level. Nearly 23% indicated that they had no opinion about the questionnaire item regarding their assessment test results. It appears that students do not have a clear understanding of the relation between assessment and course work planning.

-- Student self-reporting on the grade they earned for most of the classes taken at SWC showed that most students (60%) typically earned a grade of "B" or higher. Only 9% reported that most of their grades received at SWC was a "C" or lower. This is counter to the expectation as reported by a high proportion of students in a different study (i.e., Learning Styles Project) that they expected to perform below a satisfactory level in their course work.

Course Activities

-- Students reported that the course work activity in which they were most frequently engaged is summarizing major points and information from readings and notes. There is also considerable participation in class discussions and working on papers and projects that require combining ideas from multiple sources.

-- The lowest participation of students in course work was reported in the area of reading additional material on topics introduced in class and in studying course materials with other students.

Library Activities

-- Student responses indicated that utilization of the campus library is not high. 36% of the students surveyed reported having never checked out a book from the college library. 34% said that they had never prepared a bibliography for a college term paper. 33% had never asked a librarian for assistance in finding materials.

Student Interaction with Faculty

-- Most one-on-one interaction appears to occur when students ask instructors about general class procedures and guidelines (grades, assignments, make-up work) Nearly 40% of the responding students indicated that they interact with instructors for these reasons either "often" or "very often."

-- Students also indicated that they frequently talk with their instructors after class about course content. 29% of the responding students reported that they do so "often" or "very often."

-- The student-faculty interaction reported to occur least often involves meeting instructors in their offices. 55% of responding students indicated that they have never met an instructor in his or her office. 38% have done so "occasionally," and only 9% say they have done so "often" or "very often."

-- Nearly half of all students surveyed reported that they have, at least on occasion, discussed their school performance, difficulties, or personal problems with an instructor. An even greater number (60%) of the responding students said they had occasionally discussed their career and/or educational plans, interests, and ambitions with an instructor. 20% reported doing so "often" or "very often."

Student - Student Interactions

-- There appeared to be considerable interaction at SWC among diverse groups of students.

-- Nearly 30% of the responding students reported having had discussions "often" or "very often" with students either much older or much younger than themselves.

-- About 30% of the responding students indicated that they have "often" or "very often" had discussions with students from cultural backgrounds different from their own.

-- Discussions among students of different political persuasions and with different religious beliefs occurred less frequently. About half of the students reported that they have never had discussions with students different from themselves in these ways; fewer than 20% say they have had such discussions "often" or "very often." (Note: Differences in political or religious beliefs may not surface during student interactions unless the topic of conversation draws attention to such differences.)

-- About 71% of SWC students perceived that "all" or "most" students at the college were "friendly and supportive" of one another. An ethnic difference emerged from these reports. Anglos were most likely to report that "all" or "most" students were "friendly and supportive" (77%) while African-American students were the least likely

to do so (58%). Intermediate percentages appear for the other ethnic groups: Hispanics 71%; Asian/Pacific-Islanders 68%; and American-Indians 60%.

Art, Music, Theater Activities

-- Participation in these activities is very low at SWC. 70% of the responding students reported that they have never attended a play, dance, concert, or theater performance at the college.

Writing Activities

-- Students reported that they frequently engage in a number of writing activities. The activities with the highest reported frequency involves thinking about grammar, sentence structure, paragraphs and word choice, writing rough drafts, and preparing outlines. The activities that students said occurs least often is getting help from an instructor about how to improve their writing and discussing comments instructors make on student papers. 31% of the responding students said they have never approached an instructor for these reasons. 38% said they had done so "occasionally."

Science Activities

-- The most frequent learning activity, reported by the students surveyed, was memorizing formulas, definitions and technical terms.

-- Over half of the students reported that they had never practiced to improve their use of lab equipment nor attempted to explain experimental procedures to a classmate. (These high non-participation percentages may be due to responses from students who were not enrolled in science courses rather than to what is actually occurring in science classes. This would be an important area to investigate with future surveys or classroom activity observations.)

Vocational Skills

-- About 750 of the 1560 students surveyed (48%) reported their enrollment in a vocational program or in a course in which vocational skills were learned.

-- The learning activities in which students in vocational classes said they most often engage was listening to the instructor explain how to do a procedure and watching an instructor demonstrate a procedure. About 60% of those enrolled in vocational programs or courses reported doing these things "often" or "very often."

-- Forty-seven percent of the vocational students indicated that they "often" or "very often" practice a procedure while being monitored by an instructor or classmate.

-- To a somewhat lesser extent, but still quite frequently, 44% of the vocational students said they "often" or "very often" read about how to perform procedures.

-- To a lesser extent students reported that they identify problems and seek information from an instructor or from other resources to solve these problems. 35% of the vocational students said they do so "often" or "very often."

-- Nearly one-third of the vocational students surveyed indicated that they have "often" or "very often" diagnosed a problem and independently carried out an appropriate procedure to solve or correct the problem.

Clubs, Organizations and Athletic Activities

-- Low participation was reported in these areas as it was for art, music and theater activities.

Counseling and Career Planning

-- Three out of 4 students reported having talked with a counselor about courses, requirements or educational plans.

-- 36% of the responding students reported having talked with a counselor about personal matters related to their college performance.

-- Most students gave a "good" to "fair" rating of the helpfulness of the SWC counseling services, most students indicated that counseling is the service most readily available to students and the service which provides the best assistance for students' educational planning.

Learning and Study Skills

-- Students indicated that they receive the most instruction in the areas of writing, reading and listening skills. The least instruction is received in developing time management and note taking skills.

Estimate of Gains

-- Although students reported fairly high gains in learning to understand and get along with students of different ethnicity, students indicated low gains in learning about people living in other parts of the world.

-- Low gains were also reported in the extent to which students' SWC experience has fostered increased interest in political and economic events.

-- Students reported low gains in developing an understanding and enjoyment of art, music, theater, and literature.

College Environment

-- Overall ratings of SWC were impressively high.

-- 3 out of 4 students said they would select SWC again if they had to start over college again.

-- Students found instructors at SWC to be especially approachable, helpful, and supportive.

-- To a somewhat lesser extent, students found other SWC students to be friendly and supportive. 72% of the responding students indicated that "all" or "most all" SWC students were friendly and supportive.

-- Just over half of the responding students indicated that the college in general is a stimulating and exciting place to attend "all" or "most all" of the time.

-- About 70% of the responding students reported that "all" or "most all" of their courses at SWC were challenging, stimulating and worthwhile.

-- Fairly high ratings were given to counselors, advisors and department secretaries. Over half of the students responding said that such college staff were helpful, considerate, and knowledgeable.

Part III

Themes Emerging From Observations of and Conversations with Southwestern College Students in Classroom Settings

Background

During the summer session of 1993, three classes were observed for a total of 30 hours by a research intern. The classes were Introduction to Composition, Elementary Algebra, and General Psychology. This selection was non-random and made with the permission of the instructors who allowed the research intern to sit in their classes. The approach to this qualitative study was to watch and listen to students while they interact among themselves and with the instructors during class meetings and outside of class during breaks. Students were posed informal questions conversationally, but no formal survey was administered. The intern recorded the interactions and noted the following patterns of student behavior and perceptions of the college and their learning experiences. These included 1) classroom behavior and activities, 2) expressed student perceptions of SWC, faculty, and other SWC students, and themselves, and 3) expressed concerns about being successful in college.

These observations are summarized below. (Note: The research intern was a trained anthropologist with an earned Ph.D. from the University of California, San Diego.)

I. Classroom Behavior and Activities: The following general patterns were noted in the three classes that were observed.

- -- A high degree of class participation/group discussion
- -- Considerable involvement in diverse learning activities (small group discussion/writing; class debate; cooperative problem-solving; in-class writing workshops; audio-visual tapes)
- -- Instructor lectures were mostly to introduce or reinforce material presented in text books (limited presentation of new material)
- -- Limited note-taking on the part of students.

II. Student Perceptions of the Social Environment: The perceptions of students could be categorized in four areas -- 1) those pertaining to SWC as an educational institution, 2) those related to the basis for evaluating faculty, 3) those related to other students, and 4) self perceptions.

A. Student perceptions of the education institution:

-- Mixed; some comment, "It's just like high school;" others defend SWC's academic rigor

-- Education Center at San Ysidro reportedly a highly respected "community center;" the Center is "closer" to the San Ysidro student population socially, culturally as well as physically than is the main campus (based on observations of an instructor at the Center).

B. SWC faculty were evaluated by students along the following dimensions:

-- competency (knowledge of course subject matter)

-- professionalism (demonstrated by punctuality, serious focus on course material, dress, general attitude and behavior that reflects instructor's high self-standard for his or her role as teacher)

-- extent to which instructor makes good use of students' limited time (focus on meeting student needs and not utilizing class time for irrelevant discussions or for presentations that provide instructor's ego-enhancement, etc.)

-- communication skills (ability to make concepts understandable to diverse audience)

-- sensitivities to student backgrounds, experiences, needs, abilities (includes making presentations that do not alienate or intimidate students).

C. Student perceptions of SWC student body:

-- most students exhibited high sensitivity to/awareness of student socio-economic status

-- some older students thought younger students are "smarter" than they and have more acute cognitive abilities; one older woman felt that younger students may resent her presence in thinking that she is "taking the place" of a younger student

-- awareness of varying degrees of academic dedication (some students are "just party goers" while others "do nothing but study")

-- one student perceived fellow classmates as apathetic (this was based on other students' failure to report unsatisfactory teaching)

-- some San Ysidro students thought that younger SWC students are more likely than older students to attend college full-time and to participate in extra-curricular activities.

D. Student Self-Perceptions:

-- some older students saw themselves as needing to work harder than younger students to compensate for their perceived intellectual "slowness"

-- fatigued (some evening students comment repeatedly that they are tired/sleepy when they arrive for class)

-- some students reported feeling a sense of accomplishment from attending college and completing courses.

III. Expressed Student Concerns About Their Capacity to Succeed in College: Students discussed barriers and concerns about their own ability to succeed in college and continue their education at SWC. These concerns varied widely, ranging from finances to the role of gangs in their lives. Major student concerns pertained to:

-- finances to pay for school and other obligations

-- rising tuition that might reduce their capability to stay in school

-- coordinating work with class schedules

-- finishing their degree or program in reasonable amount of time

-- family obligations (many students were parents) that conflict with educational demands

-- education as student alternative to/emancipation from gang life (as reported by an instructor).

Although these findings must be viewed in a limited manner because of the time during which the study was conducted (summer session) and the limited number of cases that were observed (three classes), they point to the fact that students were affected by the climate that the college creates and the socialization mechanisms (in and outside of the classroom) through which students gain a greater sense of confidence in meeting the academic as well as social demands of college.

In the end, the findings provide fuel for faculty discussion and ignite the need for further qualitative research.

APPENDIX B

Southwestern College

Relationship of Research Documents to Identification of Student Experiential Themes

Number Refers to Document in Bibliography	Document/ Source of Information	High Faculty Ratings	Interaction Outside Class Low (limited meetings in instructor office)	Student Preference for Multiple Learning Techniques	Student Expected Performance Below Satisfactory	Moderately High Ratings of Grading Policy	Obstacles/Challenges to College Success: Work Schedules	Obstacles/Challenges to College Success: Basic Finances	Obstacles/Challenges to College Success: Family Obligations	English as a Second Language	First in Family to Attend College	Moderate to Moderately High Ratings of SWC Counseling	Awareness of Student Diversity	Perception of Other Students as Friendly/ Supportive	Older Students Perform Better Study More	Low Campus Activity Participation	Overall Highest Ratings on SEEs	Assessment Process Moderately Helpful for Enrollment
1	Longitudinal Study First Time Entering Students														■			
2	Student Satisfaction Survey Fall 92	■○						35% Used □ Financial Aid				■ ○	■			○	■	■
3	Summary Analyses of Student Performance						■	■	■	■	■				■			
4	Occupational Program Student Survey Spring 92							□										
5	Student Follow Up 5 Year Avg., 88 89, 89 90	■◆				■	□	□				■	■					
6	Summary Academic Faculty Survey 89 90	□	■	□	12% F T Say Well Prepared □ 42% P T Say Well Prepared	○							■			□		
7	Educational Center at San Ysidro	■										■					■	
8	SWC Learning Styles Project	■		■	■									□				
9	CC Student Survey 1990 (CCSEQ)	■	■	□			■	■	■	■	■◆	■	■	■◆	□	■	■	○
10	Student Observations/ Discussions	■○		■			■	■	■	■	■	○	■	■	□	□	□	○

Strong Supporting Evidence	Informal/ Indirect Support	Counter Evidence	Not addressed	Ethnic Differences Appear
■	□	○		◆

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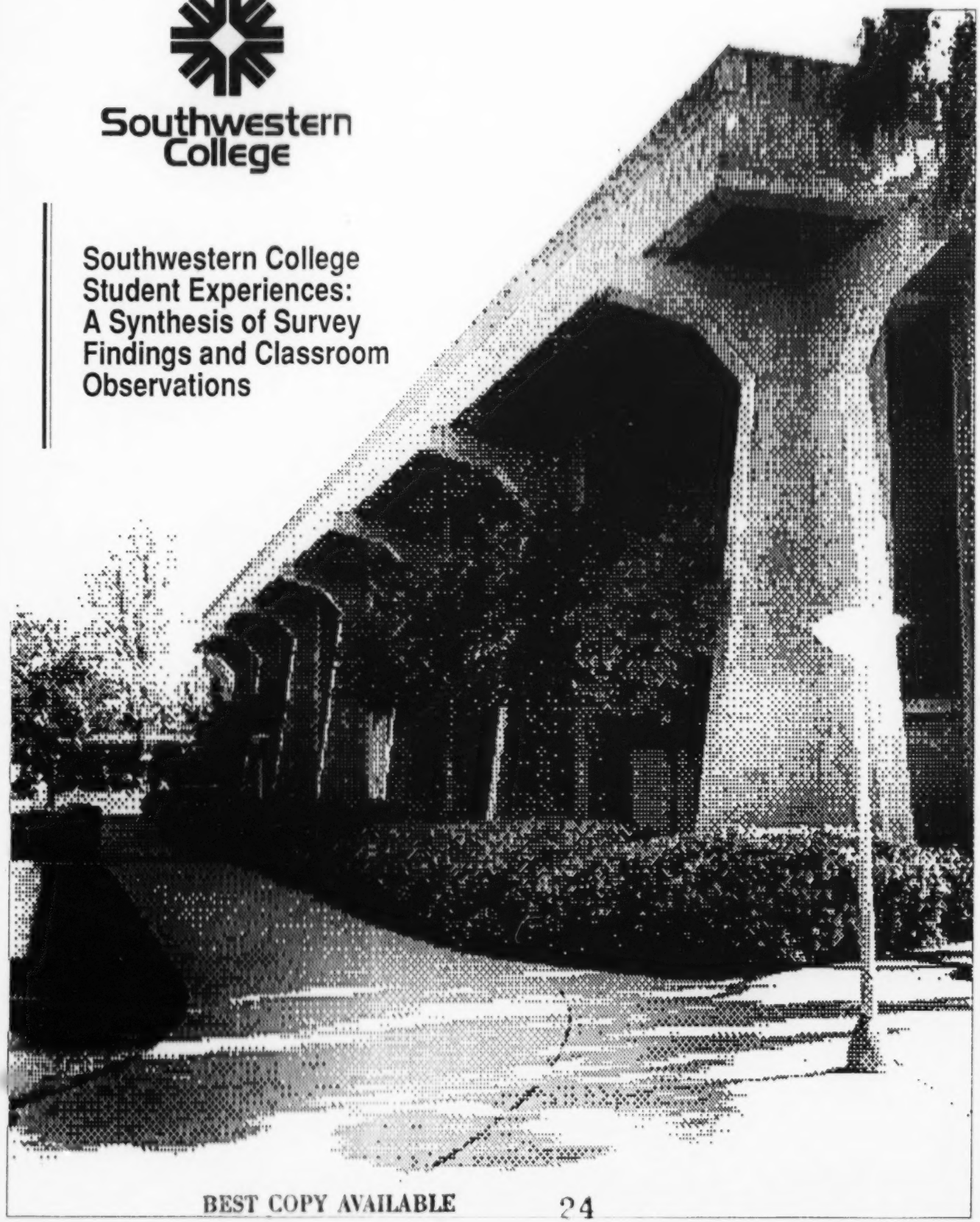
Southwestern College

Southwestern College Student Experiences: A Synthesis of Survey Findings and Classroom Observations



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SPECIAL REPORTS

The major functions of the College Planning, Research, and Grants Development Office are to:

- Facilitate the strategic planning efforts of the College
- Augment the College's Management Information System (MIS), utilizing data bases maintained by computer services
- Conduct institutional research
- Assist faculty and administration to seek grants and respond to external public and private funding agencies

In order to carry out these interrelated functions, the College Planning Office collects, analyzes and synthesizes information from a wide variety of internal and external sources to help members of the College community better understand the changing environment and operations of the College.

Special reports are intended to provide information about institutional operations, programs, services, staff and students, as well as the community at large. The topics addressed in each special report contribute to the pool of knowledge necessary for planning, assessment, and on-going decision-making processes of the College.

The Governing Board, administration, faculty, and staff increasingly must share responsibility for conducting affairs that fulfill the College mission. It is important that this collaborative responsibility be carried out in a spirit of mutual understanding of the agreed upon goals of the College. It is also essential that they share a common information base with which to assess current and future conditions so that informed choices can be made. Objective appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the College's operations, programs and services is an essential prelude to their improvement. Special reports are intended to supply information to help in this endeavor.

Interested parties may request copies of such reports from the College Planning Office.

Southwestern College Planning Office
900 Otay Lakes Road
Chula Vista, CA 91910
(619) 482-6302/6303

1993